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S E R M O N

Occasioned by the justly-lamented

D E A T H

O F

Anthony Walburge, Esq^r;

By THOMAS NEWMAN.

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Eliz: Strongitham,

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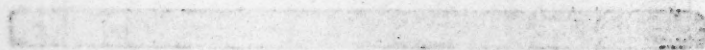
Occasioned by the joyful liberation

DEATH

OF



By THOMAS NEWMAN.



*The Darkness of Divine Providence
considered and improved.*

A
S E R M O N

Occasioned by the justly-lamented

D E A T H

O F

Anthony Walbidge, Esq^r;

T R E A S U R E R

T O

St. Thomas's Hospital,

W H O

Died, *June 23, 1749.* *N*

By THOMAS NEWMAN.

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ROMANS xi. 33.

Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God ! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out !

THESE words are the emphatical close of the Apostle's reasonings with the Jews, in defence of the divine Providence respecting *their rejection*, who had been for so many ages God's favoured and distinguished people ; and the calling, or admitting, the Heathen World, who had so long *seemed* to be rejected, to a participation of the Jews privileges, which they could no more digest, or reconcile with the divine proceedings in time past, than their own exclusion from the divine favour. As the text refers to the *Apostle's immediate* subject, it is brought in to suppress the Jews censure of, and to conciliate their minds to the belief of, that dispensation and method of the divine proceedings, which he had assured them was then to take place : by putting them in mind of the *reaches* of the divine knowledge and wisdom, from whence there resulted such a *depth* in the divine councils and determinations,

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tions, that they were not presently to be censured, nor condemned *meerly* because they were not to be accounted for by them; since the *unsearchable extent* of his perfections, who had the absolute Government of all, who had the diversifying of events, the disposal of his own gifts, and who *always acted under the influence* of those perfections, must render his dispensations dark and mysterious to his creatures; whilst at the same time they yielded them the most satisfying assurance, that they were perfectly wise, righteous, and good.

But however suitable these words are to the Apostle's *particular* argument and subject, it's very plain from their form and import that they contain an *eternal* truth, and are an acknowledgment, both as to the sentiment and affection therein expressed, which will *ever* be due to God, and readily subscribed by all that know him and understand themselves. For they are, "an adoring celebration of the immensity of those perfections; exercised by the great Ruler in the government of the world; with an humble and dutiful confession of the unsearchableness of his schemes, and the inscrutableness of his methods for the accomplishing of them". *Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!* how far then *must his judgments* be beyond the search or reach of the human understanding! how *impossible* is it *his ways* should be traced by any human sagacity!

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The former contemplation must lead to this acknowledgement. Let it be here observed, that tho' the Apostle only mentions the *wisdom* and *knowledge* of God, yet his other rectoral perfections are implied therein: since where the wisdom is *perfect*, the acts which result from thence must be consistent, yea accompanied with righteousness and goodness. --- There is much in these words to promote the highest veneration of God, much that is monitory, and instructive to us. In order to promote those worthy ends, I would endeavour to shew:

I. How we are to understand these expressions respecting the unsearchableness of Providential events, or in what respects they may be so termed—

II. Whence it proceeds, or upon what grounds this truth rests, or for what reason it must be allowed---And then assist in the improvement of what is suggested.

I. Let us consider how we are to understand these expressions, that *the judgments of God are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out*. Here I would observe---That this is not affirmed of *all*, but only of *some* dispensations. Many of these works of the Lord may be sought out, or found, by those who study them, whilst others have obscurity upon them not to be penetrated. In some cases what God is intending to do appears in the very *face* of events, but as to others we are left in the dark, and are unable to descry the divine scheme---I would observe further,
that

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that these assertions of the Apostle are far from intimating any *confusion* or *disorder* in the course of Providence ; as if things were not conducted by fixed rules, or as if the divine acts were at any time *absolutely*, or *in themselves* unaccountable, as meer arbitrary acts are, for which no reason can be given but *will* and *power*. We generally term those persons and their acts too, unaccountable, who are governed in their conduct by no principles more stated than inclination and appetite, by no rules more rational than ability and opportunity. But far be such inconsistency and imperfection from the Governor of the world, as is betrayed hereby, and must follow from hence. Though *some* of his acts are inexplicable by us, yet *they* are equally with others under the invariable influence of all his perfections ; from which he can no more depart, which he can no more disregard, in any single act, than he can cease to be. If this was not the case, or if *every* dispensation of Providence was not under the united conduct of the divine perfections, what we now stile the *judgments of God* would indeed be past our finding out ; but not, in that *honourable sense*, or from that *adorable reason*, for which they now are really so, even from the *depth* of his knowledge and wisdom ; but for a reason, reflecting the highest dishonour upon him, and most uncomfortable to ourselves, even their having no Wisdom nor Goodness in them. That *some*
Providences

Providences then are unsearchable, is not from any want of council or perfection in the particular acts, or from any confusion in the divine proceedings ; since the very reason the Apostle here assigns for this their character, is the unfathomable extent of those excellencies in the eternal Mind, from whence they flow, and by which they are conducted---I would observe once more : these assertions do not exclude *all* Beings, excepting the divine Being, from a capacity of tracing those dispensations which are past our finding out. It is a supposition that may be reasonably made, that what is dark and inexplicable by us, may be clearly understood by Beings moving in an higher orb : that the Spirits above are so far privileged, and that a considerable part of their felicity flows from hence, even their having a more perfect insight into those providential appearances in our world, wherein the divine wisdom is most concerned and illustrious, than we can have where it is most conspicuous to our shallow minds. There may be reserves even from Angels, secrets confined to the divine breast : but doubtless we are led to believe a distinguished display of the divine councils to those wise and holy intelligences, as they are represented standing before the throne of God ; employed in embassies from Heaven, both merciful and vindictive to our world ; and expressing their concurrent admiration and applause of the divine proceedings

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ings from the illustrious evidence of their excellency, *Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty, just and true are thy ways, thou king of Saints !* *

The assertions in the text then respect us as in a *state of tryal*, in which it ever will be true, and highly fit it should, that many things in Providence are concealed from the most sagacious human eye.

---This brings me to consider the words more directly and positively ; or in what respects Providence may be termed unsearchable by us. Now the Apostle giving this description of the divine dispensations, *immediately* upon his adoring reflection on the wisdom and knowledge of God, I think this unsearchableness respects the perfections exercised in the divine acts : and is equivalent to this proposition,----“ That we are not in many cases capable of perceiving or tracing the wisdom, righteousness, and goodness, which actually do accompany *all* providential events.”---Let us then see what it is in Providence which is unsearchable by us, respectively to the perfections therein exercised. And for brevity sake I shall confine myself to the two heads the text specifies : *viz.*----The designs and councils of Providence,---And the means employed for their accomplishment.

1. The *designs* and *councils* of Providence are in a great degree unsearchable by us. The word *judgments* in the text generally stands for

* Rev. xv. 3.

for adverse or afflictive events : but sometimes for divine dispensations in general : and so I shall understand it here. Revelation leads us to conceive of the divine acts by the analogy they bear to the process of *our own*. We first form designs and propose ends, and then direct our acts to the obtaining them. This may be a very imperfect representation of the divine manner of proceeding ; but it is kindly accommodated, as many other representations of him are, to our capacities, and by them must we judge. Upon *Jobs* uttering great complaints under his uncommon tryals, Zophar puts him in mind of his incapacity of sounding the depths of Gods proceedings with him, or ascertaining to himself the reasons of them, which he terms the *secrets of wisdom* : and appeals to his calm reflections on what he must know both of God and himself, whether by the utmost range of his thoughts, and the scrutiny of his own understanding, he would ever be able to penetrate the divine designs *. *Canst thou by searching find out God, canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection? It is as high as Heaven ; what canst thou do ? deeper than Hell ; what canst thou know ?* In like manner the Psalmist represents the divine purposes and intentions : *thy judgments are a great deep* †. “ The ends of thy dispensations are vastly beyond the reach of our enquiries, they are layed too low for us to fathom ”. Instruments may be visible, facts sensible, the na-

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ture

* Job. xi. 6. 7. 8.

† Ps. xxxvi. 6.

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ture and kind of the proceeding apparent ; but what Providence is *mainly* and *ultimately* intending to bring about by such events, may be a great secret to us : the grounds and reasons of the intermediate steps, from the obscurity of the *end*, must lye beyond the sphere of our apprehension.

The *aspect* of things and the *purpose* of God are oftentimes very different : as in the known cases of Joseph, and the people of the Jews in the time of Ahasuerus : and they who should have judged of the divine councils from the external face of things, would have been greatly mistaken. That is not a sufficient key to God's designs. For we are assured, his intentions may not be vindictive, when the appearances of things carry the mark of severity * : his designs may not be favourable, when the immediate course of things may be encouraging and smiling †. There are probably more *immediate* and more *distant* ends in the divine mind : if we discern the former, we may still be in the dark as to the latter : nor can we many times judge of the thoughts of his heart by the steps that are taken, whose thoughts and purposes are a great deep ‡. To offer at the comprehending his profound designs in many instances, only shews how little we understand our selves and him : how easily we may be mistaken, and he be misrepresented : for as the Apostle
appeals

* Gen. l. 20. † Ps. xcii. 7. ‡ Ps. xcii v.

appeals immediately after the text, *Who hath known the mind of the Lord?* or, who is acquainted with the designs and views of the All-perfect mind, so as to comprehend the schemes that are there layed?

2. Providence is in many instances unsearchable by us, in respect of the means used for the accomplishing ends. This, I think, is meant by the latter expression, *His ways are past finding out*. Every one sees this is a necessary consequence of the former. So far as the *councils* and *designs* of Providence are concealed from us, we must be incapable of judging of the propriety and fitness of means for the effecting those purposes. In all those cases where we know not what God is doing by what we see done, it is impossible we should be qualified to pronounce upon the wisdom of the methods which we see are taken. If his *designs* are not to be *fathomed*, his *ways* are not to be *traced*: for it is only according to the nature of the end, that the means for the accomplishment of it can be deemed well or ill chosen. But supposing we were ever so sure of the divine purpose, or that the council of heaven lay ever so plain before us, yet how incompetent judges are we of the fitness of those *intermediate* events, of that *chain* and *series* of means, that infinite wisdom may chuse for the bringing his purposes to pass? We can only conjecture by the simple appearance of single events; we cannot discern

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cern their *connection* and *dependancies*; and therefore must be often at a stand, and constrained to acknowledge his ways are above our thoughts. Had God *revealed his purpose* of advancing *Jacob's* family, of preserving them and many others from famine by *Joseph's* means; yet who could have perceived any *tendency* or *propriety* in the successive steps which Providence took for the effecting that design? This was indeed an extraordinary instance, but doubtless it was intended for our instruction: and what is more obvious at first sight, what more applicable to our circumstances in this world, than this lesson? *viz.* that the ways and methods that God takes for the subserving his own ends are not to be guessed at by us; nor are we oftentimes able to discern the traces and tendencies of the steps that we see are taken, however plain to our understandings his purpose might be. When the divine councils then are so mysterious, and so far out of our sight, and we oftentimes know so little what God is bringing about, it necessarily follows, that we can no more understand the reason of *particular* events: nay, nor did we ever so clearly discern his ultimate view, could we perceive the fitness and propriety of the means he makes use of for the accomplishment of it. For who of us can pretend to comprehend, or to have within *our* view, that boundless latitude and scope, wherein the divine wisdom and
power

power may be exercised for the effecting it's own designs ; or how that wisdom and power can render means subservient to what is intended to be brought about ?---Thus are the judgments, or dispensations, of Providence unsearchable : thus are its ways and proceedings beyond our tracing. I proceed.

II. To shew upon what reasons and grounds these assertions of the Apostle are built : which, if considered, I think will amount to an evidence, *that it is impossible it should be otherwise.*

I. The necessary superiority of the divine nature must in many cases render providential events unsearchable by us. The Apostle is here celebrating the unfathomable depths of the knowledge and wisdom of God : that is, the infiniteness of the divine understanding, implied in *knowledge* ; and the transcendent exercise of it in the administrations of providential Government, styled *wisdom*. Now, the perfection of acts must answer to the nature of the Being whose acts they are. If therefore there is a Providence, a God presiding over the world, who hath the management and disposal of all causes and events, his administration must consist in the exercise of his own perfections ; which, as he possesses them in the highest possible degree, must often be exercised beyond our reach. If he *act like himself*, his works must oftentimes be too wonderful for us. Besides, there is something

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thing peculiar in the very nature of *knowledge* and *wisdom*, which implies and admits a vast *variety* and *extent* of acts; which excellencies, when they are in perfection as they must be in God, render us less able to pronounce what is within their compass, or consistent with them, than we are as to some other perfections. To say then that Providence is *the display of infinite wisdom*, which is an essential part of its very definition, is at the same time and by the same words to acknowledge, that *it doth great things past our finding out, and wonders without number* *; or that it must in the course of its exercise take measures, and employ means of which it must be beyond our capacity to discern the reason and the tendency. The more perfect the principle is in God, the more dark, mysterious, and surprising must what we behold of it be: it is unreasonable, and an evidence of great want of reflection, to *expect* a thorough knowledge and discernment of all his proceedings. So that when the Apostle in the text expresses his rapturous wonder, and ascription of profound depths and a vast extent to the knowledge and wisdom of God, he assigns a necessary and indisputable reason of his judgments being unsearchable, and his ways past finding out.

2. The divine government, exercised over such a creature as man, *requires* that many things

* Job. ix. 10.

things in providence should be concealed from us. It is an acknowledged evidence of the wisdom of *human* governments, and a liberty allowed to those at the helm, to withhold many of their designs from the publick : the nature of the thing bespeaks the great propriety and fitness of their reserving many things to themselves for the very ends of government : and when we are satisfied from our own observation and experience of the wisdom and equity of the administration, we are contentedly ignorant of the motives and reasons of their determinations, and all complaints or objections from their not being understood by the subject are deemed unreasonable. By a vast superiority of reason must it be allowed agreeable to a *divine* government and Providence, exercised over such creatures as we are, that it should have its secrets and reserves, though not for the same reasons that human governments may require them. Our Lord seems strongly to intimate this, and to lead his disciples to a sense and dutiful acknowledgement of the divine prerogative, when speaking of the future destruction of Jerusalem, and also of the end of the world, he saith, *but of that day and hour knoweth no man, no not the Angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father* *. To the same purpose and with the same view he speaks in another place ; upon the disciples anxious enquiry,

* Mark xiii. 32:

enquiry, whether that was not the time for the commencement of the kingdom, which they had flattered themselves should take place, he replies, *It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his power* *. The expression is remarkable: “It is not becoming you to enquire, it is not fit you should know: it is the prerogative of the Father to reserve that to himself: times and seasons are *his*: they are matters belonging to *his* province, not to yours.” With such an argument *Elihu* endeavours to silence *Job*, complaining of Providence; and he seems to be more effectually silenced by it than by any other reasonings: *in this thy complaint, saith he, thou art not just, for God is greater than man. Why dost thou strive, or dispute, with him, since he giveth not account of any of his matters* †? It is a kind of appeal to his reason, whether it was to be *expected*, that the Ruler of the world should in no acts of his Providence surpass the reach of our understandings; or whether it could be thought that he was under any obligation to open the designs of all his proceedings to us, or communicate the reasons of all his dispensations. — And as it is thus most becoming the great Governor himself, to reserve many of his own designs and councils to himself, so it is most congruous and fit it should be so in respect of such creatures as we are, who are the governed.

* Acts i. 6, 7. † Job 33. 12, 13.

governed. We are in the infancy of our Being, and therefore in many respects are to be dealt with as children : amongst other things, it is very suitable to that our circumstance, that the measures which our heavenly Father intends to take with us, should be concealed or kept a secret from us. He hath been pleased to give us all that assurance of his general concern for our welfare, and that instruction as to the general end of his dispensations, which our duty and comfort required : but were he to reveal his *secret* purposes and views, it would but bewilder and embarrass our minds; and disfit us for our duty and enjoyment. Were all the divine councils to lie open to common inspection, so that from present appearances we should be able to collect the future intentions of Providence, it would probably be abused to the establishing that most wild notion of *fate* and *necessity*; against which, amongst other things, the secrets in Providence and the unsearchableness of the divine dispensations, are a standing argument. Nay further; were all the councils of heaven to be communicated to us, it would greatly, if not absolutely, set aside that trust, that hope, that dependance on God, which derive their *value*, as well as their essence, next to their being enjoined, from their being exercised under the great uncertainty of events. Had it been *revealed* to *Abraham*, along with the command to sacrifice his son, that it was the divine purpose

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pose to *prevent the execution*, what tryal of his faith, or evidence of his obedience had there been, in proceeding so far as he did towards it? Every one must see upon the slenderest reflection, that it could in no sense have been the one or the other, but as the reason of the order, and the actual event was *concealed from him*, and *past his finding out*. It is the vail that is upon future events, and our inability of penetrating the future designs of Providence from present appearances, that leaves room for, and inspires a due thoughtfulness, dutiful resignation, and a becoming reference of affairs to God; for which otherwise there would be little or no exercise.

3. Many Providences must be beyond our comprehension in their designs and reasons, or we must be very incompetent judges of the wisdom, righteousness, and goodness of them, from the shallowness of our understandings. Our apprehensions and judgments of things must be measured by our capacities; and they are very scanty. The highest improvement of our understandings serves, may I not say *chiefly*, to convince us, that here are a multitude of things we cannot account for, which yet we are constrained to admit as truths; and that our minds are greatly disproportionate to the subjects of knowledge? What wonder then that the *divine* wisdom should be too wonderful for us to trace, or that its exercises should be beyond our reach! Would it
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not argue most reproachful ignorance of ourselves and of God too, a most uncreaturally arrogance and presumption, to pretend to match mind with mind, or knowledge with knowledge? Alas! we can see but a very little way before us, and in a multitude of instances can judge of events only from the appearances of single facts: but what judgment are we likely to form of many divine dispensations by this means; when the plan of Providence is often times of a great extent, and all intermediate events have a reference to an ultimate one at a distance? It is probably but a very small part of an whole that falls under our observation, or that we can take in. How then can we have any just estimate or understanding of *that* part, the beauty and intention of which depends upon its relation to other parts? Or how can we comprehend a scheme who are incapable of having an *entire* view thereof? However wise vain man would be, he is confined to the scanty limits of his own capacity; insomuch that things are soon too deep for his penetration, too complicated and mysterious for his comprehension. Here-upon God's judgments must be unsearchable by us, till we can find out the work that he doth *from the beginning to the end*, which is impossible*; since in his proceedings *he bath the end* before his own view *from the beginning*†. — Upon these grounds and for these reasons, with
C 2 others,

* Eccles. iii. 11. † Isaiah lxvi. 10.

others, is the Apostle's, assertion most true, and what both reason and revelation attest.

Amongst other dispensations upon which there is a great obscurity and cloud, and under which we are very much in the dark as to the exercise of the divine wisdom, with the other governing perfections of the great Ruler—amongst others of this kind, I say, this is one, “The calling away persons by death out of this world, no more to be beheld and enjoyed; in the ripeness of age; in the perfection of their faculties; at a time when the world stood in the greatest need of them: uncommonly furnished both from capacity and disposition for the service of God, of the Redeemer, and their generation, and were *actually* and *eminently* useful in these respects: But---They are removed, whilst a multitude are spared, under whom the earth, in a manner, groans, as the very pests of society.”---Such a dispensation of Providence we are at this time reflecting upon, and most justly lament, in the loss of *Mr. Anthony Walburge*; from whose distinguished virtues the cause of God and religion, the most beneficial of all others to the world, received such advantages, as greatly to heighten the painful sensation of his being removed from our sight, and the burial of his very useful talents with himself.

He seemed singled out by Providence for some great and useful work, and eminent service to mankind, by the uncommon furniture
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of his mind, his happy and generous disposition, and the perfect easiness of his circumstances: what his estimate of those distinctions of Providence was, and in what light he looked upon himself as vested with them, was abundantly evidenced by the *application* of his talents. His natural temper led him to solitude and retirement; but as he was so eminently qualified for, so, happily for others, did principle prevail with him to engage in, publick life, for the sake of publick usefulness. His independency on the world, was not, as is too commonly the case, prostituted to sensuality or self-indulgencies; but was generously improved as a call to, and privilege for, the gladdening the hearts of his fellow creatures: the opportunities for which he embraced as they came before him, seeking nothing beyond the honour and pleasure of doing good.

Upon the resignation of a considerable post and trust by a worthy Gentleman * through want of health, the eyes of a great number of the most considerable persons in the city were turned at once upon him for a successor. This, unsought by him, and unanimously tendered, he, after his usual calm and deliberate weighing the affair, accepted; I am perswaded I might add, *to the joy* of those who conferred the honour, and committed the trust, from his tried ability, his unspotted integrity, his inflexible justice

* Samuel Lessingham, Esq.

justice and great humanity. These were so conspicuous in him, as to be sufficient vouchers for the most faithful and christian use of the power and influence thereby conferred. May I not appeal to all those Gentlemen, whether their satisfaction in their choice, though, alas! but of a short continuance, was not renewed every time they met, from the clearness of his head, the calmness of his temper, the strength of his judgment, and his conscientious application to the subserving the design of that charity, by the most prudent measures, and to the greatest extent.

The uncommon degree of esteem and reputation which he enjoyed, he merited: And so uncommon it was, as to require a singular strength and greatness of mind to sustain it. But he knew how to wear, as well as to deserve, the just tribute the world was agreed to give him. His modesty and humility under all, was an indisputable evidence that he was influenced by a nobler principle, and animated to his unwearied application for a publick good by a nobler motive, than human applause.

From his own felicity of temper and the calmness of his own passions, which nature greatly befriended and religion improved, he was both authorized and qualified to be a peace-maker: a character not less amiable in itself, than beneficial in its influences. He had a particular dread of divisions as a grand ob-

obstruction to, and bane of every great and good design, and from thence was very jealous of every seed and principle of it: it was his solicitude to surpress and check every folly of passion in others, to soften what appeared harsh, and to conciliate minds one towards another, by promoting the kindest sentiments of each other. But notwithstanding this his love of peace, in all matters of moment he adhered steadily to the dictates of conscience, equity, and honour: nor could fear or friendship prevent a calm opposition to others. In short, it was eminently seen in him, to what perfection Christianity, where it had a due influence, would raise the natural accomplishments of the mind, and what an amiable direction it would give them.

He well understood christian duty, and christian liberty; or where he was bound, and where he was free, as a disciple of Christ. By those his sentiments he governed himself, and what he claimed in right of a christian, he allowed to all others, in virtue of the same right. What his judgment of preference was, with respect to the particular modes of worship amongst christians, was well known: as well known was his judgment of charity, or christian catholicism. What was *essential* to christianity, what only is in esteem with God in *all* parties, and for that reason is in highest esteem with those who have most of God, and best understand their religion, was
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ever by him admired and beloved *where-
ever* he beheld it.

By his exemplary attendance on christian institutions, and a walk becoming the Gospel of Christ, he publicly avowed his faith in him ; and in that way as well as others endeavoured to support his honour and religion, and to transmit it to succeeding generations. The writings that breathed the most divine and heavenly spirit he frequently mentioned with the strongest relish, and often expressed his wishes for the prevalency of that spirit in the world. Sure indication of the *power* of religion upon his own heart, and that he knew wherein it lay !

From all this, and much more that might be added, which many can vindicate as strictly true, he enjoyed the most friendly affection and warmest wishes of those who knew him, that could attend the living ; and now, — he hath all the respect and tender sense of loss that true worth can inspire for the dead. For by his removal, religion hath lost a faithful friend ; liberty, benevolence, righteousness and charity an exemplary advocate ; this society an ornament ; and the world a blessing.

From hence, had we had the command of that life, we should have protracted its period : had we had power over that spirit, we should have retained it ; since for the *noblest* reasons our hopes and wishes united in imploring his stay amongst us. But since he in
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whose hand the power of life is hath seen fit to contract it, sure we are, it was most wisely measured. Let us therefore join with the Apostle in his adoring acknowledgement, and thereby express our submission and satisfaction in this act of Providence; *Oh! the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!* But, because there is a cloud upon this event, because it is one of those dispensations that are unsearchable by us, one of those steps which are past our tracing, it is necessary that we betake our selves to our professed *principles*; which we shall do by attending to the reflections and conclusions to which the subject naturally leads us.

I. Reflection. How unreasonable is it to *deny* a Providence, or even to *censure* it, upon the account of those events that are dark, or unsearchable by us! *Suppose* only at present, that infinite wisdom doth govern the world: upon this bare supposition I would ask, whether such minds and understandings as ours must not be often in the dark as to the councils and purposes of the *infinite*, the all-comprehending mind? Must there not, unavoidably, be ends proposed, and from thence, methods taken, that are beyond our reach? How then can that be an argument *against* the reality of a Providence which is a *certain* and *natural consequence* if there is an All-wise director and disposer at the head of all?—

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Further,

Further, the *censuring* of Providence from an obscurity upon its dispensations, is as unjustifiable and unreasonable as the *denying* it for that reason. If we allow the truth in general, we must acknowledge that those events which are most impenetrable by us, or where we can least discern the perfections of the great Ruler, are equally *his* acts with others that are more upon a level with our understandings: if *they* then are the acts of Providence, we are assured by the same evidence, that they must be in perfect agreement with, as they are in fact the exercises of, those perfections which unitedly accompany *all* the divine acts. If they are the works and ways of an holy, wise, and righteous God, they must be as perfect in all those characters as they can be, though we perceive it not. His being *God* is a sufficient ground not only for the calm, but the *subscription*, of our minds, to every dispensation; and for the suppressing every jealousy or suspicion, even when he surpasses our understandings. Indeed, the darkness or unsearchableness of the divine judgments is so far from justifying our censures, that it aggravates the unreasonableness of them. For, how preposterous and reproachful is it to censure what we do not understand! to pass a sentence upon what is out of our reach! Our *ignorance* of the works and ways of God cannot possibly be any thing of an *evidence* against them. If we do not *see* the wisdom and beauty

ty of the divine proceedings, it is monstrous to infer from thence that they are unwise, or shades in the divine administration, whilst we allow them to be *his* dispensations, whom we acknowledge to be holy in *all* his ways, and righteous in *all* his works*. In short, it is from the infinity of God's perfections, and the scantiness of our faculties; it is from the depth of his wisdom, and the shallowness of our understandings, that there is a cloud and darkness upon his proceedings. How unreasonable then to arraign the conduct of the All-wise God! when for ought we know, what wears the face of loss and calamity, may flow from love, and terminate in good.

2. How happy are we, and how easy ought we to be, under the divine administration, amidst all the unsearchableness of God's ways and works! If clouds and darkness are *sometimes* round about him, we are sure that righteousness and judgment are *ever* the base on which his throne rests †. However impene- trable by us, some of his proceedings may be, even *they* are founded on, and regulated by, the most inviolable justice and equity. Though his judgments are a great deep, yet his righteousness is firm and unmoveable as the great mountains ‡. God doth not require that we should discern his perfections in those events wherein they are not discernable by us: but

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only

* Psal. cxlv. 17. † Psal. xcvi. 2. ‡ Psal. xxxvi. 6.

only, that from the abundant evidences of his perfect administration in general, we should implicitly believe, and practically acknowledge, that the *same* wisdom and justice are exercised in the darker operations of his hands, as in those that carry the marks of his Providence and perfections in their very face. And how reasonable is this! Whatever difficulties attend *particular* dispensations, the general principles are so fully and firmly established, as to strike a light under any cloud, sufficient to calm our minds, and to guide our practice. God hath given us those notices of things, as are most suited to our circumstances of existence, and to answer his purposes therein. He hath shewed us so much of *himself*, and hath given us such indisputable evidence, that his unerring understanding directs *every* event, as to render the part we are to act very plain, and to produce a prevailing tranquility in our own breasts under the darkest appearances. We have the highest reason to acquiesce in his government of his own world, and in the disposal of his own creature. What if he hath not shewn us the grounds and ends of some acts of his Providence, nor opened to us the secrets of his own designs; yet we have sufficient ground to be easy and satisfied, since, from the depth of his knowledge and wisdom, the highest reason must attend *every* part of his administration. Though we are in the dark, we know we are safe: the divine wisdom

dom will answer every difficulty. How happy then is that soul, who, under the evidences of this great truth, hath settled this with itself as its governing principle, "God doth all things wisely and well". What a peace and serenity doth this diffuse through the mind ! what a preparation of it, is it to receive *any* events ; and for adoration and praise, an affectionate confidence and, rational self-enjoyment, under *all* !

3. How great is the felicity of the heavenly state ! how grateful is the hope and prospect of it ! As the present method of the divine government is a standing argument that there is a future time and state, where present inequalities shall be set strait ; so it seems to me to be a very considerable article in the *happiness* of it, that the mysteries in Providence shall then and there be revealed, and we shall have an enlarged view of the divine perfections in the government of the world, to the compleat satisfaction of the enlarged mind. Nothing seems more adapted to the entertainment of a reasonable soul, since *curiosity* is one of its strongest appetites, and *admiration* one of its most pleasing passions, than the opening and unfolding of various dark Providences, that we have been witnesses of in our passage ; as they were really ordained by the deepest wisdom, to bring about the purposes of grace and goodness. Since the Gospel hath illustrated the future degree

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degree and manner of our conceptions of subjects the most sublime, by the differences in knowledge between children and perfect men, why may we not suppose Providence to be one of those subjects, since his glorious attributes, who we are assured we shall see face to face, are exercised and displayed therein? and from thence why may we not conclude, that what is now concealed from us therein, shall be the object of our *intuition*, and what we know not now we shall know hereafter? This state is to us in many respects a state of darkness, *that* in every respect is a state of light: here we sit down in wonder under many mysteries in Providence because we cannot unfold them; there our wonder will be raised to a greater height by the disclosure and revelation of them: at present we can at best discern but a small part of wisdom's plan and design; hereafter it will appear, if not absolutely, yet comparatively, entire in its parts, and proportions: for in God's light shall we see light. Many things are now painful through our ignorance of the reasons and ends of them: but oh! how will our uneasiness be changed for satisfaction, when our own minds shall be able to see through the labyrinths of Providence, and our lamentations be converted into the applauses of wisdom and goodness! Must not this be felt by those of us who are thirsting after knowledge? who can be in raptures with the speculation, and think
ourselves

ourselves rewarded for days of labour, if we can but master a considerable difficulty, clear up a doubt in the way of truth, or but add a few mites to our stock of knowledge? Will it not be a sublime pleasure to the enlarged and devout mind, to have the secrets of God's government layed open; to see how designs were layed; the admirable conjunctions and dependencies of things; the wise and gracious ends proposed with the direct and beautiful aptitude of the means to subserve them? To be let into the hidden springs and views of many intricate proceedings with our selves and others; and consequently to descry the perfection of that wisdom that ordained those dispensations, which the infidel herd ascribed to a *fate* and turned against Providence; which the rash and passionate misrepresented and blemished; and the very best were forced to own were beyond their reach and view— Nothing but heaven itself which gives the sensation, can give the apprehension of this pleasure. But blessed be God! that the Gospel revelation encourages such an hope, and will support it. I will then indulge my soul in the confidence of those discoveries hereafter wherein it will peculiarly exult, and in its own enlarged capacities for contemplation. In how different a manner shall we then sing, *oh the depths of the riches both of the knowledge and wisdom of God!* probably it will not a little enhance our future pleasure therein,

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in, that we are seldom able to rise to an higher note *now*, than in the following words, *How unsearchable are thy judgments, how far are thy ways past finding out!* Methinks this if attended to would considerably promote our reconciliation to our own exchange of worlds. How pleasurable is the expectation of that hour, when we shall quit this dark and cloudy state, this scanty horizon, for that of light and full revelation! How should our resignation accompany our regret at the loss of our best and most useful friends! when we have such reason to believe, that upon the true Christian's enlargement from the cell of the body, the soul will have that extended view of things, as will not only enable it to vindicate, but to adore and *applaud* the divine administration in every part, as death will bring him near the objects of his devout curiosity, and be the elevation of the faculties to apprehend them. Though so much hath been said, suffer this word of exhortation.

Since there is one called out of the world, from the service in which we as Christians are professedly engaged, who was so eminent in furniture, faithfulness, and diligence, in the pursuit of those ends that are most worthy of a man and a christian, let our loss in him inspire an emulation in us who are left, of acquitting ourselves as he did, in the expressions of our hearty concern for the interest of
Christ

Christ in the world, and in our usefulness to mankind, according as God hath dealt or shall deal, severally to us ability and opportunity. He was a distinguished man: but by what distinguished? but by the virtues of the Christian, which way then can we so truly and fully evidence the sincerity of our esteem for him, and our concern for the loss that the world and the church of Christ hath sustained by his removal, as by cherishing and exercising the same sublime excellencies, which are at once, and in the highest sense too, both ornamental and useful. As dark as this Providence may be in some respects, this its voice is very manifest. "He is dismissed, but we are still upon duty. Though our hands then are weakened by his removal, yet let not our hearts be dismayed: but on the contrary, let it promote a stricter and more unanimous agreement amongst ourselves, for the discharging the duties of the christian life, the working the works of him that hath sent us into the world, and the displaying the benevolence of heaven upon earth". This will not only have praise with men, but what is infinitely more *sure* as well as more desirable, it shall have praise from God.

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